

Commonly asked questions about hummingbirds

How long does a hummingbird live?

Not much is known about their lifespan, but many experts believe the average is about 3 to 5 years. The current record holder is a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird. She was banded as an adult in Colorado in 1976 and recaptured in the same location in 1987, which would have made her at least 12 years old.

How fast does a hummingbird's heart beat?

Their hearts can beat as fast as 1,260 beats per minute, which is the rate measured in a Blue-throated Hummingbird, or as slow as 50-180 beats per minute on a cold night when they experience torpor, a hibernation-like state.

How fast does a hummingbird's wings beat?

The Giant Hummingbird beats its wings 10-15 times per second. The fastest recorded rate is about 80 beats per second on an Amethyst Woodstar Hummingbird. North American hummingbirds average around 53 beats per second in normal flight.

Attracting hummingbirds to your home

What to plant

Planting flowers that attract hummingbirds can be done in a window box, containers on your porch, on a trellis, or in a flower garden. Hummingbirds will explore all flowers, but are particularly attracted to trumpet shaped flowers such as columbines, honeysuckle, penstemons, paintbrushes, bleeding hearts and trumpet vines.

Making your own food

Although commercial food mixes are available, it is easy to make your own hummingbird sugar solution at home. The basic recipe is 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. Dye is bad for birds so don't use food coloring. Boil the mixture for 1 to 2 minutes and let cool. After filling feeders, store the extra in refrigerator. In temperatures above 60° F (16° C), don't leave sugar mixture in feeder for longer than 48 hours because it can spoil. Do not substitute honey or artificial sweeteners for sugar when making feeder solution because they don't offer the nutrition that hummingbirds need.

Hummingbird drawings courtesy of Dr. George C. West

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Chamizal National Memorial



HUMMINGBIRDS of Chamizal National Memorial



Rufous Hummingbird
Selasphorus rufus

Spotlighting the common hummingbird species of Chamizal National Memorial

Interesting Facts

There are over 330 known species of hummingbirds found only in the Americas.

At 2¼ inches (5.7 cm) long, the Bee Hummingbird of Cuba is the world's smallest bird.

A resting hummingbird takes about 250 breaths per minute.

Hummingbirds can fly forward, backward, and even upside down.

The Rufous has the longest migration route of all hummingbirds—up to 3,000 miles (4828 km)—traveling from summer in Alaska to winter in Mexico.

To avoid starvation, the average hummingbird eats half its weight in nectar and insects each day.

If the average man had the metabolism of a hummingbird, he would have to eat 285 pounds (129 kg) of meat every day to maintain his weight.

Hummingbirds can be aggressive and have been known to attack much larger birds including jays, crows, and even hawks.



Black-chinned Hummingbird
Archilochus alexandri

The Black-chinned is the most common hummingbird of Texas. While both the male and female are green in color, the male can have either a black chin or a completely black head, purple band, and white throat. The female has a white chin and a somewhat washed-out throat with green streaks. The Black-chinned is mainly a nectar eater but will also eat insects. They tend to make their nests out of twigs and spider web silk.

Measurements

- Length: about 4 in. (10.2 cm)
- Wingspan: 5 in. (12.7 cm)
- Weight: .11 oz. (3 g)

Nest Information

- Brood size: 2–3 chicks
- Incubation: 13–16 days
- Fledging: 21 days

Migration through El Paso

- April–September



Rufous Hummingbird
Selasphorus rufus

The Rufous is the only hummingbird regularly found as far north as Alaska. It has a green head and back. The male Rufous has a copper-colored throat patch; a rusty-brown head, body, and tail; a white chest and belly; and dark wings. The trill the male makes with its wings identifies him from the female. Females are not colored as brightly as males. They have a few iridescent flecks in the throat, large white spots on the tail, and a green head and back.

Measurements

- Length: less than 4 in. (10.2 cm)
- Wingspan: 5 in. (12.7 cm)
- Weight: .11 oz. (3 g)
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Nest Information

- Brood size: 2–3 chicks
- Incubation: 13–16 days
- Fledging: 21 days

Migration through El Paso

- April–September



Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Selasphorus platycercus

Broad-tails are commonly seen in the Western mountain ranges of the Rockies and Sierras. The male is metallic green with a rosy-red band on his throat, a green crown, and a broad tail. The larger female has green central tail feathers with outer tail feathers that are rust-colored at the base, black in the middle, and white on the outer tips. They are sometimes mistaken for the female Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds.

Measurements

- Length: About 4.5 in. (11.4 cm)
- Wingspan: 5 in. (12.7 cm)
- Weight: .11–.13 oz. (3–3.6 g)

Nest Information

- Brood size: 1–2 chicks
- Incubation: 14–17 days
- Fledging: 21–26 days

Migration through El Paso

- July–August



Anna's Hummingbird
Calypte anna

A native to southern California, Anna's are also occasionally seen in El Paso. It is one of only three species that is a permanent resident of the United States. Unlike most other hummingbirds, Anna's can sing. The adult male has a dark tail and a rosy-red iridescent crown, chin and throat. The female has a green crown and a gray chin and throat with variable amounts of thin dark streaking or rosy red spots.

Measurements

- Length: 4 in. (10.2 cm)
- Wingspan: 5 in. (12.7 cm)
- Weight: .14 oz. (4 g)

Nest Information

- Brood size: 2–3 chicks
- Incubation: 14–19 days
- Fledging: 18–23 days

Migration through El Paso

- November–March